

THE
RIGHT
OF THE
Christian People,
AND THE
Power of their Pastors,
IN THE
Ordination of Ministers of the
Gospel asserted, with some
Directions for Reformation.



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The Right of the Christian People, &c.



F one would know the truth in any point, touching religion, that's in controversy between parties contending for the preheminnence in this world, the keenness of each Faction must be far from

him, and the less concern he has in the temporal Interests of either side, he is the more fit to judge of the strength of their arguments, so far as these are able to instruct him in things that have a reference to eternity. In the heat of contention, every party snatches the readiest weapon for self-defence, or for the hurt of the adversary. And in this case something of the truth may be found on both sides, but mixt with a deal of falsehood, and in that field of battle, it appears not like it self; it drudges here to the ambition, avarice or fleshly ease of a set of men, and serves to promote the temporal interest of one Faction upon the ruin of another; and is ready to be treated by either side according to the appearance it makes against their interest. Yet truth, wherever it

appears, demands regard, and it is not the least part of the duty we owe it, to contribute to our power to deliver it from the slavery it is put to by them that want only to serve themselves of it.

Would it not move the indignation of any man that indeed believes the holy scriptures to be the words of eternal life, the words of God's grace that teacheth us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts, and to look for the blessed hope; to see these scriptures wrested by all parties of men, contending for worldly preheminance in one shape or other, to answer their designs and serve them in their malice and guile, hypocrisies, envies and evil speakings against one another? In opposition to this, it becomes us to study the exhortation given us by the apostle *Peter*, when he telleth us, *That all flesh is grass, but the word of the Lord endureth for ever*, and calls us to lay aside all malice and guile, and as new born babes to desire the sincere milk of the word that we may grow thereby. if so be, we have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

There is no controversy more famous among us at this time, than that concerning the right of the christian people, to elect their pastors and the power of the pastors in that matter.

The people's right was not long ago debated with no small heat among the Episcopal dissenters from the established church; and these of them that found their interest in it, pleaded most zealously for it, with all the criticisms on *συγκатаφινξις* and *χεροτων*, and

and all the quotations of the antients, that their reading could furnish them with: For all sorts of clergymen will stand up for the rights and liberties of the people, when they find this necessary to raise themselves; tho', aside from that, it will take a power of grace to make a clergyman a hearty friend to the liberty of the christian people. After much contention among these clergymen, they at length saw their interest lay in coming together, and such union of the clergy is not the most friendly thing in the world to the liberty of the laity. But we are now again amused with a very hot debate in the establish'd church on the same subject. And one would think, there must be something in this right of the people; when no sort of church rulers are ashamed to have recourse to it on proper occasions, yea, they can glory in patronizing it, tho' at the same time, it must be own'd, there is a principle (not very christian) in the people, that inclines them to give good heed to those teachers, that zealously proclaim their right, and make the loudest complaints to them of their superiors, as encroaching upon it. And this contention in the church is not very unlike the strange bustle and confusion in the state about the excise bill. Yet because it pretends an interest in the scriptures and a concern in religion, it demands the attention of them that believe the scriptures and would not desire to be utter strangers to any thing that pertains to true religion, let the interests of the differing parties be what they will. For whether this debate issue in their
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separation from one another, or their coming together on some general terms of agreement (in both which cases we may suppose, from what has hitherto appear'd, the clergy will see to themselves) yet the truth is the truth still, and something ought to be said for their sakes who may be honestly enquiring after it, let the number be never so small. For however whimsical they may appear that seek the truth without any worldly design, but with a respect to the world to come; no man's labour is ill bestowed in contributing to their satisfaction.

The question about the call to the ministry of the gospel, or word of faith, supposes the truth of that gospel; and they that are so unhappy as to disbelieve it, cannot plead any concern in the question. They can go no further than this, that every man has a right to instruct his neighbour in every thing that's good for him to know, as far as he is able, and as is consistent with the good of the body politick wherein they enjoy privileges together; and so it must be in the power of that body, to take care that it suffer no damage, by any pretended exercise of this right among the members. But as to the church or kingdom of Christ, his officers and the whole order of that society, they have nothing to do about it, except it be to shew their greatest dislike and contempt of whatsoever appears most agreeable to the gospel; tho', after all, it cannot be reckoned exceeding discreet in them thus far to meddle with other mens matters, whereof they are not the most fit to judge. They are indeed

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sometimes called upon and appeal'd to by both Parties in this and other questions about the christian institution, when they plead reason and nature's light against one another, where they have least to say from the scriptures; but this is their folly and weakness to enquire at the light of nature, what a positive institution should be.

It is not a sign of the greatest regard to the gospel, in them that profess to believe it, to speak as if what the New Testament says of the ministry of the word and such things, serv'd only for that age wherein it was committed to writing. For if this were the case, why had we any thing but the essentials written to us in that Book? And why do we observe and admire the divine providence in the preservation of that book, in a society that corrupted the whole of christianity, and in the bringing of it again forth to the view of the nations, in their own languages, as his testimony against all the corruptions of that same society? And may not these of that *Roman* church as well alledge, that the New Testament serv'd indeed for the time wherein it was written, but as for after-ages, it belong'd to them to adapt christianity to these times? The New Testament was suited to that age? However it is manifest they speak lies in hypocrisy, who make insinuations this way to the discredit of the only rule of christianity, and yet pretend, that the New Testament, and the practice of the first christians recorded therein, is the Rule of their consciences as to this matter of the people's right.

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That the writings of the Old Testament and the New contain a compleat revelation of the will of God to men, cannot be deny'd without the highest reflection on the truth of the revelation, that plainly sets it self out as a declaration of the whole counsel of God, to which nothing can be added. The Old Testament plainly promised, in its conclusion, a further revelation, and the New Testament declares itself to be that revelation, while it concludes with a curse on them that add to it, as well as on them that take from it. If therefore the New Testament say nothing on this question about New Testament ministers, that depend entirely on the gospel, no man can say anything of it that can be submitted to as a divine institution, unless it could be proved that the New Testament has lodg'd a power in any man or society of men, to say in this matter what they think fit, or to act in it as they please, and till this be done, which in all appearances will never be, we must rest our selves content with what the scriptures say, and examine every thing that men tell us by that.

And seeing the holy scriptures contain a compleat revelation of the will of God to men, no man can now pretend to be so called of God to the ministry of the Word, as the inspired men, whom he choosed to give out that revelation, and to whose mission he bore witness in an extraordinary manner. But what these men were to them that had the divine oracles from their mouths, that their writings are to us, as our Lord said of the writings of Moses: and

the prophets; *they have Moses and the prophets let them hear them, and if they will not believe Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded tho' one rose from the dead.*

The question then is, how the holy scriptures declare that men are called to the office of feeding Christ's people by his word fully contained in these Scriptures? For if the whole counsel of God be declared in them, and the ministry of the word of revelation depend wholly on that revelation; no man can lawfully pretend a call from God to give out the least addition to that revelation; and as little can any pretend to be called of God to the ministry of the word already contained in the scriptures, but according to these scriptures; and every man that's called according to them has his call.

The New Testament law speaks not so clearly of any thing, touching that ministry of the Gospel which the Apostles left behind them on the earth, as of the characters of them that should exercise this office, which are expressed in the epistles to *Timothy* and *Titus*, and of the manner wherein they ought to exercise it, as is to be seen in *Paul's* discourse to the *Ephesian* elders, in *Peter's* exhortation to elders, and in our Lord's commission to ministers with whom he promises to be present to the end of the world.

It was most necessary, that the christian law should be express on the characters of the persons that should exercise this sacred office, seeing it is not confin'd to any fleshly seed or

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particular family, as was the priesthood, under the Old Testament. And if we may not be certain whom we are to receive as ministers of the word, by the description that the christian law gives of the persons, as the church of the *Jews* might be of the descent of their priests from *Aaron*, we are at a considerable loss beyond them; especially when the New Testament requires such duties to be done to them, as cannot be done, unless we know them, and contains such threatnings to them that reject them and such promises to them that give them suitable reception, as must make every true Christian anxious to know who they are, and for what end are these characters so express and particular, if it be not that we may by them know who are called of God to that office and who not? And can it then be said, without a reflection on the Christian law, that this end cannot be reach'd by it, or that we cannot thereby have as great certainty, as the nature of the thing requires, concerning them whom we are bound to receive as ministers of the gospel. If the rule of the New Testament were in all things followed there could be no difficulty in this matter. For no new convert could enter upon the exercise of this office, till he was well known to the christian society, whereof he was a member, and wherewith he assembled and daily conversed, and which compar'd him with the description given of a minister of the word by the Apostles and Evangelists; and this description was the same that's now written to us

the New Testament. In such a society did a man then enter upon the exercise of this office, having the apostolick description of a minister apply'd to him by a people professing subjection to Jesus Christ in submitting to the oversight of an Elder or Bishop called by him to that office. The case of *Appollos* was a little extraordinary. He had been a teacher among *John's* disciples, and was privately instructed by *Aquilla* and *Priscilla*, who were well known to the church in *Corinth*; and they, upon intimate acquaintance with him at *Ephesus*, where there was yet no church, recommended him to the church in *Corinth*, where he first exercised the office of a minister of the Gospel. However, even in this case, the church where he began his ministry had enough of certainty about his character.

It is not in the power of any to add to or diminish from the description given of a minister of the gospel in the New Testament, so as to insist on any qualification as needful, that is not mentioned there, or to make any qualification there spoke of needless. Neither was Jesus Christ the Lawgiver, given to any ministers or people any power or right whatever, to call, send, elect or ordain any person to that office, who is not qualify'd according to the description given in his law; as he has not given any power or right to reject the least of them that are qualified according to that law. Let a Man have hands laid on him by men that could prove an uninterrupted

descent of imposition of hands to him from the apostles, let him be set apart to that office by a company of ministers, the most conformable themselves to the scripture character of ministers, and let him be chosen by the most holy people on earth; if yet he do not answer the New Testament description of a minister (which is possible if the scripture be not the Rule of their Judgment in this particular case) he is not called of God to that office, and is indeed no minister of Christ but runs unsent. And if this be the case, the boast in vain of any manner of election and ordination who study not conformity to the scripture description of a minister in the exercise of that office: For no manner of ordination ordinary ministers can pretend such a cleaving foundation in the New-testament, as the description of the persons that should be ministers. And they that do indeed study conformity to that description, can securely have their ministry called in question and rejected by all sorts of men on grounds whereof the christian law makes no mention; yea their ministry cannot be rejected without disobedience to Jesus Christ.

Thus, whoever is conformable to that description the christian law gives of a minister of the word, has all the call and mission that the Lord gives any man to that office; and whoever wants that, whatever he have, has not God's call.

The only part therefore that any sort of

can claim in this matter is that of obedience to the christian law.

Ministers, elders or bishops, in this, as in all other things wherein they preside among the christian people, are to teach them to observe what Christ has commanded them, and to go before them as their leaders by doctrine and example in the way of faith and obedience to the word of Christ contained in the scriptures. They have no power to separate any man to that office whom God has not called. His law gives them only the power of obedience in separating the men who are called by him, according to his word; and in this they are not lords over his heritage, but ensamples, to the flock which is among them, of obedience to their only Lord.

No people have right to elect any whom God has not called, or to reject these whom he calls; but they must obey him in receiving and doing all that he requires of them in his word toward them that are by him qualified according to the description given in his Law. If they be not capable to discern by that description, who are called of God to the ministry of the word, they are not capable to give obedience to the christian law on that head. The only part of the character, as to which they are supposed incapable to judge, is that of aptness to teach, or holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound Doctrine both to exhort and convince the gainsayers. If pastors be to judge of this by their skill

skill in the wisdom of words, or the wisdom of the scribe and disputer of this world, which cannot be brought down to the capacity of the christian people, how can they persuade the people that any man is called of God to the ministry of the Word? Or how can the People perceive that their Pastors are leading them in the way of obedience to Christ in separating a man to that office whom they cannot know that Christ has called? In this case 'tis impossible for them to profess obedience to Jesus Christ in receiving one of his ministers according to his law; they must inevitably give a blind obedience to their pastors instead of Christ; if these pastors do not instruct them in that wisdom of words, so far as to enable them to perceive that a man is thereby apt to teach. But the New-testament makes the widest distinction betwixt that wisdom of words, and the faithful word, which he that's separated to the ministry of the gospel must be holding fast, that he may be able both to exhort in sound teaching and to convince the gainsayers; so that a man may be very learned in the one, and very unlearned in the other. And since the christian law plainly sets aside this wisdom of the scribe and disputer of this world, as being no part of the description it gives us of a minister of the word of faith; neither pastors nor people have any more to judge of on this head, but the soundness of the doctrine, and aptness to communicate it to others for their instruction, conviction and comfort. If the people may err, and be mistaken as to this,

so may ministers, and what error is there among the people that has not been maintained by ministers? But still if they be not able to know this in any measure, they are in no measure capable to obey Jesus Christ, in receiving and submitting themselves to the oversight of his ministers.

The People cannot take impressions made on them by the doctrine, for their rule of judging in this case: For there are wrong as well as right impressions, and these must be judg'd of by the scriptures, and the faithful word contained in them. There are various impressions, according to the variety of the situations of the people, yea, and oftentimes according to their humours; so that it is scarce possible they can agree in judging by this rule, as they can in perceiving that a man brings sound doctrine to them; and if the faith once delivered to the saints be preached to them, whole fault is it that they are not edified? Yea, and if they were to judge by impressions in this matter, they might come to reject that part of the scripture doctrine that they did not find impressed on them, as well as the minister that holds fast the faithful word; at least this could not miss to produce the same thing that the apostle condemns in the *Corinthians*, that went into parties and factions on their experiences by means of different preachers of the same doctrine.

A People cannot pretend to be obeying Christ in this thing, who are not shewing a regard to all his commands, nor living in subjection to the

the discipline, expressly instituted in the scriptures. Zeal for the good work of obedience to one of his laws, while there is no respect shewed to other as plain laws of his, is utterly inconsistent with the scripture character of a christian people. And how can a people pretend a regard to the word of God, in contending for their right of election, who shew not the same zeal for as clear a right of theirs, even the profession of subjection to Christ in contributing of their substance for the maintenance of their pastors, that so they who preach the gospel may live of the gospel, as they that minister'd about holy things, eated of the temple, and they that waited at the altar partaked with the altar? Why do they suffer this right to be wrung out of their hands, and yield it up peaceably to any that please to take it from them, while they are so jealous of the least incroachment on the other right?

And as no People can pretend to be obeying Christ in this matter, but they who are studying an universal conformity to the description of a christian people in the new testament, so no ministers of the gospel can act in it as pastors, but among a flock hearing the voice of the chief shepherd Jesus Christ. Their commission beyond that is only to preach the gospel to every creature; neither can they pretend to be the representatives of the people in the part that the christian law calls them to act here, and as little can any part of the people represent another in their obedience to Christ, as to which every one of them must

give

give an account of himself to God. And why may not the people be as well represented in all the other parts of their obedience to the laws of Jesus Christ?

When a people, studying conformity to the scriptural description of a christian people, shall happen to want pastors, and have the christian law, this want cannot render them incapable of obeying that law in receiving and submitting to any as their ministers, that are evidently qualified according to that law. For they have the apostles, and tho' they want elders, they should hear them, and so have elders.

The turning of the part that men have to do in the ordination of ministers, out of the channel of humble obedience to the plain word of God, has been the spring of all the confusion and disorder that has taken place in the world about the ordination of ministers. When the wisdom of man made bold to make the least alteration in one point of the divine institution, it was for this end to recommend christianity more to the world; and this end was steadily pursued by the covetousness and ambition of the clergy, and the carnal zeal of the People for the worldly honour of christianity and their own ease, till it became a worldly religion. One alteration in this point, as well as on other heads, made way for another to support that, and so on till the world was filled with usages, regulations, constitutions and laws, which came to be more attended to than the word of God, that was in effect

made void by the keeping of these. And while such wise regulations came in upon pretence of unity, order and decency, but serv'd mainly to the worldly exaltation of the clergy, and carnal ease of the People, they have filled the world with such envying and strife, such wars and fightings, as could never have happened to them that contented themselves with the scripture rule. Yea these regulations have plainly appeared at length to be proper engines of war to parties contending for the preeminence in this world. And therefore, if men be in earnest to reform in this matter, they must lay aside every invention of humane wisdom, and give over proudly contending for a right that clergymen, who cannot prevail in ruling the church, are persuading the people that they have, and their superiors are taking from them; even as the mob is enraged continually against the government in the state by them that cannot prevail at court; and they must return to the old course of humble subjection and obedience to the plain word of God, the word of eternal life, without adding thereto, or diminishing from it. *And this is the right of the christian People, and the power of their pastors.*

While the confusion remains that has flow'd from a falling away from the scripture rule, and has come by men's pretending to be masters instead of obedient servants to the Lord Christ, we ought not to deny their ministry, who, in any tolerable measure, answer the scripture description of a minister; nor need we be afraid

to disown the ministry of any sort of men of the greatest name, who do not, in any tolerable measure, bear a conformity to that description. This is a far surer footing to go upon than that, of the manner wherein a man comes into the possession of the stipend in a parish, and becomes the publick teacher there. It cannot be told where the New Testament speaks so clearly of parish ministers and of stipends provided by law, and of elders not apt to teach ruling the people and representing them in the election of a parish minister, or of the majority of heads of families or communicants choosing a minister to all the rest of the parish, and to the stipend, as it speaks of the characters of a minister of the gospel, and calls us to receive such. Neither can it be so well told, where the New Testament says, that it is my election that makes a man my minister, as where it forbids me to reject a minister of Christ, and obliges me to receive a man because he is one according to the description of a minister in the christian law.

But if men will not thus live at ease in a disorderly corrupted state of things, and want to see a true reformation, then let them seriously deliberate on the following proposals.

1. Let the holy scriptures be attended to, and held fast, in opposition to every other rule that men walk by; as, the imaginations of their own hearts, the course of this world, the traditions of the fathers and commandments of men, and seducing spirits, speaking beside the scriptures, speaking of the world, and deny-

ing directly or indirectly that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is what *Paul* recommends to *Timothy* as a preservative against the perilous times in the last days, 12 *Tim.* iii. He sets before him the things he had learned of him, his doctrine and manner of life, now written to us in the New Testament; and this, with the scriptures of the Old Testament, which, he says, *Timothy* had known from a child, he points out to him as sufficient to manifest the folly of them that resist the truth, and to make the man of God perfect, throughly furnish'd unto all good works. And, by what he there says, their folly may be manifest, who for the sake of other rules that they would have us to walk by, reflect on the holy scriptures, as dark and of doubtful interpretation, as the common resort of hereticks, and as fitted only to the first times of christianity; and not proper for the times we live in. And yet by such like insinuations as these, from men professing that the scriptures are the only rule of christianity, are poor people frighted from searching the scriptures, and leaving close to them in their practice, lest they should fall under delusion, against which the scriptures are not, it seems to them, so proper a preservative as other rules that they are call'd to walk by. The apostle, forewarning the *Thessalonians* of the man of sin, and of the strong delusion, that God was to send on professors of christianity, that receiv'd not the love of the truth, gives them this direction against the beginning of this evil, *stand fast, and hold the traditions*

which

which ye have been taught, whether by word
 or our epistle, 2^d Thess. ii. These tra-
 ditions, which he calls them to hold, were
 partly written in his epistle, and partly deli-
 vered to them by word of mouth; For the
 New Testament scripture was not then com-
 pleted; but they had the whole counsel of
 God declared to them by the apostle, which
 is now so fully declared in the writings of the
 New Testament, whereof the epistle to the
 Thessalonians is a part, as nothing can be
 added to it. If therefore we would escape the
 corruption of christianity, that was then begin-
 ning to work, and the strong delusion there-
 foretold, we must firmly hold the things de-
 livered to us in the New Testament, without
 adding to them or taking from them. We
 must not satisfy our selves with an idle con-
 fession, that the New Testament is the word of
 God, but we must hold fast by it, as our only
 rule, in opposition to all other rules that have been
 added to it or come in the place of it; we must
 hold fast the things delivered there, in our
 practice, without turning to the right hand or
 to the left. And in order to this, let us hearken
 to the advice the apostle gives to the
 church in Rome, which, if it had been al-
 ways attended to, might have prevented all the
 abominations of that worldly kingdom; at the
 head of which, that church came to be in after
 ages. He says, *Be not conform'd to this world;*
but be ye transform'd by the renewing of your
mind, that you may prove what is that good
and acceptable and perfect will of God, Rom.

xii. Let them that are ministers search the scriptures diligently, and with a single eye, clear of worldly respects, and however much they know of them, let them yet be perswaded they are able to make them wiser, and let them still be disciples of Christ, depending on him, as little children, for instruction from him, by opening their understanding to understand the scriptures. And let them not shun, for the fear of the people, or for any hope in this world, to speak all the words of eternal life, and to declare the whole counsel of God, keeping nothing back, knowing this, that the word is not committed to them to give it out as they please, and that now since the revelation is finished, there is no part of it but what is profitable for making the man of God perfect, or thoroughly furnished unto all good works. They must not only take care of handling the word of God deceitfully, and study to teach Christ's disciples to observe all he has commanded, but they must also go before them, as ensample of holding fast the things delivered in the scriptures, in a diligent observation of them, the least of them not excepted: *For he that shall break one of these least commandments and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.* And let the christian people also to their power, search the scriptures, and examine every part of the doctrine of their ministers, and their example by the scriptures, comparing scripture with scripture, that they may be followers of them only, as they can see them following Christ, and

and so profess subjection to the gospel of Christ
 following them. Let them bring all their
 former thoughts and opinions in matters of
 religion to the standard of the scriptures, ready
 to give up with every principle and practice
 that has no foundation there, and to take up
 with every doctrine and practice that shall be
 found there, and without delay to observe all
 things whatsoever Christ is found requiring there,
 however little they have been observed before.
 Even as the captive *Jews*, returning from ty-
 pical *Babylon*, reformed themselves by the
 written law, which, thro' the good providence
 of God, remain'd among them, notwithstanding
 the captivity, and all the corruptions that
 had prevail'd among them, and after they no
 more enjoy'd many of the glorious things that
 attended the first giving out of that Old Tes-
 tament revelation. The Lord encourages them
 under their wants with this, that they had
 his word and his spirit remaining among them;
 and they diligently read that word, and what
 they found written there they forthwith practis-
 ed, tho' some of these practices had not been
 in use from the days of *Jehua* the son of *Nun*.
 Tho' we cannot now pretend to many things,
 that accompanied the giving out of the New
 Testament revelation, and behov'd to cease
 when it was compleated, as the apostle ex-
 pressly declares they should cease, 1 Cor xiii.
 Yet, by the wonderful providence of God,
 we have the writings of the prophets and the
 apostles of Christ preserv'd, and brought into
 our own language, so as all have access to
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know them : And in this case, it is not the practice of the returning reforming Jews written for our learning, that we may take them as our example in this thing. Let us therefore, as they did, give attendance to the reading of the scriptures, to exhortation and doctrine, that we may be, by them, furnished unto every good work, and hold fast the things written there, so as not to let them go, or add any thing to them, in confession or practice for any hope or for any fear wherewith we can be moved.

2. Let the description that the New Testament gives of a christian, as well as of a minister, be carefully observed ; for as all they and none else, may be acknowledged as christians, who are in some measure conformable to that description. Our obedience to Jesus Christ depends, at least, as much on the knowledge of this, as on our acquaintance with the scripture character of a minister ; and great evils have followed upon a departure from the rule of the New Testament on this head as on the other. It is impossible for us to search mens hearts, and to know who is a true christian in the sight of God, so as to distinguish him from one that is a hypocrite only in his sight. But there are such peculiar duties required of us towards the children of God, and the brethren of Jesus Christ, on account of their relation to him, with such promises and threatnings annexed, that we had been in the greatest difficulty about our obedience to Jesus Christ, if his word

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law had not also described to us the persons to whom it obliged us to do these duties. Shall we think that the christian law hath made our peculiar esteem and regard to a people whom we cannot know, to be the grand evidence of our love to Christ himself, and of our interest in him? Or are we to stand or fall at the judgment seat of Christ, and is it to fare with us eternally according to our behaviour to a peculiar people whom we cannot by any rule distinguish from other people?

The New Testament leaves us not at this uncertainty; but gives such a description of these whom we are to look on as the brethren of Christ, as will serve to convince Christ's enemies at his appearing, of their neglect and hatred of him, by their neglect and hatred of the least of these his brethren whom they saw in this world, and as will serve, on the other hand, to manifest his peoples love to himself by their deeds of love to one another, while they lived together in the world. The description given in the New Testament of these to whom we are to behave as the children of God, and brethren of Christ, is so clear, as to leave us at as little uncertainty as the *Jews* and the nations, their neighbours, could be in, as to them that were of the Seed of the *Jews*. We may take these few texts for instances on this subject, which is one way or other touched on throughout the New Testament, *Mat.* xii. 48, 49, 50. *1 John* iii. 23. *Mat.* vii.

vii. 21, 22, 23. *Heb.* vi. 9, 10. *Mat.* xviii. 3, 5, 6. *Mat.* x. 36, 37, 38. *Luke* xiv. 27. *John* xiii. 34, 35. *Rev.* xii. 17. 1 *Thessal.* chap. i.

The extraordinary signs that appear'd about Christ's disciples at the erection of his kingdom, and whereby the Lord bare witness to the first fruits of the *Gentiles*, when he visited the nations, to *take out of them a people for his name*, are now ceased, because there is no more use for them; but that *work of faith*, that *labour of love*, and that *patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ*, that was the product of the gospel in the first christians, must remain as long as christianity remains in the world. And as the distinguishing character of a christian was made up of these three from the beginning, so it must be still to the end of the world: For, says the apostle, *whether prophecies, they shall fail, whether tongues, they shall cease, whether knowledge, it shall vanish away—And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity*, 1 *Cor.* chap. xiii. And therefore, where the work of faith appears not, nor the patience of hope, but especially where there is no appearance of charity, in that labour of love shewed towards his name, in ministering to the saints, as he requires in his word, there, let men think what they will, there is no appearance of christianity.

We are not to take the description of the children of God from our own fancy: For
through

through our self-liking, we are ready to fancy, that likest to God that's likest ourselves; nor are we to take the description of a child of God from the esteem and approbation of the world, as if these who are highly esteemed among men for holiness, were so likewise in the sight of God; for by that rule the *Pharisees*, who were *an abomination in the sight of God*, would have been his children, and his son a *Samaritan*, having a devil: But let us take the description of a christian, with whom we are to behave as with the brother of Jesus Christ, only from his own word in the New Testament. Let all our notions of a christian's character be examined and corrected by that infallible rule. Let the greatest names of men that *could speak with the tongues of men and angels*, if yet they be not conformable to that description, fall in our esteem before that rule. And let the least of Christ's brethren be acknowledged by us according to that rule, though the *base, weak, and foolish things of the world*, and though they should be *hungry and thirsty, naked, strangers and in prison*, or whatever their circumstances be in this world, and however they be despised among men.

There is the more need for cleaving strictly to the scripture-description of a confessor of the name of Christ, that the New Testament foretels a false profession of christianity coming in place of the true one, and setting it aside: For *Paul*, forewarning *Timosby*

of the *perilous times to come in the last days*, points out the danger of these times in describing the people that should then have a *form of godliness, denying the power of it*; and, as a guard to us against the peril of these times, he gives this charge,—*From such turn away*, 2 Tim. iii. By this new form of godliness, or of christianity, suited to the people there described, the *outer court of the Lord's house* came to be troden under foot of the nations, and the man of sin rose to his seat in the temple of God, and the power of the people, whom God took out of the nations for his name, was scattered, when, by this form of godliness, they came to be mingled again with the people of these abominations; and so that took place which was pointed at in the prophecy of *Ezekiel*, chapter xxxiii. verses 17, 18, 19.

The apostle likewise gives *Timothy* a sample of these, that in the last days should have the form of godliness denying its power, in them who at that time, under the name of *Christians*, went about craftily among the disciples to subvert the true profession of christianity, and prevailed on them that had not attained to that knowledge of the Truth, whereby they might be delivered from the dominion of their lusts; and therefore wanted a profession of christianity under which they might have some more ease in the fulfilment of them. And these were, on the one hand, the *Judaizers* largely described in the epistles of *Paul*; and, on the other

hand,

hand, they that were confident of their justification by a knowledge and a faith, that they said they had, which did not shew itself in works of obedience to the gospel; for they came to know their justification a shorter way, as we see in the epistle of *James*, and in *Jude*, and the second epistle of *Peter*.

The apostle compares them whom he thus shews to *Timothy*, to the *Egyptian* magicians in their opposition to the word of God, to keep his people in bondage whom he made free to serve him. And thereby he insinuates, that, as the true christian profession was at first established in the world by signs, so that other form of godliness should have signs on its side also, whereby men would harden themselves in cleaving to it, in opposition to the true profession of christianity described in the scriptures, to which God bare witness by all the signs recorded there. But he says these men shall not proceed the full length, even as these *Egyptians*, though they held pace with *Moses* so far, did not go the full, and were obliged to own themselves outdone by the finger of God. So none of the men that ever gloried in any signs that they imagined to be wrought in favours of the modern form of christianity in any shape of it, can so much as pretend, that the signs they talk of ever proceeded the length of the signs whereby God bare witness to the profession of christianity that's described in the New Testament. How shall we then turn away from them that have a form of godliness,

liness, denying the power of it, as the apostle charges us, but by turning to the christianity described in the New Testament, and there exemplified to us in the way of the first christians, to which the Lord bare witness by such signs as no other christianity in after ages could ever pretend to?

If we would indeed be so much as scriptural professors of christianity, let us every one seek to be conform'd to the scripture description of a christian, without cutting or carving upon it, or seeking to bring it down to us but to have our selves brought up to it, without adding to it or taking from it. And let as many as are thus minded separate themselves to the law of God, from these that shew no such purpose of heart, but are willing to rest in the form of godliness, denying the power of it, or denying the ancient works of faith, labour of love and patience of hope which is the power of godliness. And here also we may study the example of the typical *Israel* in their reformation when they returned from typical *Babylon*. They not only refused the *Samaritans*, offering to incorporate with them and build the temple, that refusal brought no small trouble upon them, but long after that, they found, in reading the law of God, that the seed of *Israel* should not be mingled with strangers, and particularly they found it written, that the *Ammonite* and the *Moabite* should not come into the congregation of God for ever; and when they had heard the law, they separated from

from *Israel* all the mixed multitude. They
 trembled at the words of God, and were not
 afraid to depart from the practice of their
 fathers, that had departed from the law of
 God on that head, tho' they themselves had
 been before following them in that departure :
 For they separated themselves from all strangers,
 and stood and confessed their sins, and the ini-
 quities of their fathers. If christians had
 trembled as much at the word of God, on
 this head, as they did at separation, when the
 form of godliness without the power of it
 was taking place, christianity had never been
 so much corrupted in the profession of it as
 it has manifestly been. And there has not
 been one true step of reformation from that
 corruption, taken at any time, but by them
 that were more afraid of the word of God,
 and shuned a departure from it, more than
 separation or departure from their former
 courses, and the courses of their fathers, or
 from the fellowship of any sort of men in the
 world. Let them, therefore, that seek to be
 conformed to the scripture description of a
 christian, be separated to the law of their
 Lord, confessing their sin, and the iniquity of
 their fathers, in having fellowship, in that form
 of godliness, with them that deny'd the power
 of it. And whereas they and their fathers in
 this nation have been zealous contenders for
 such a form; and have sworn to it, and for
 the sake of that expressly abjur'd Christ's own
 institution, under an odious name, let them
 confess the iniquity of that also; and so study
 reformation.

reformation according to the New Testament in Christ's blood, which can both direct and enable them to all the reformation that God requires of them, and is the only everlasting covenant that shall never be forgotten.

Let them assemble themselves together, in the confession of the faith that is in Christ the Son of God the Mediator of that covenant, and in obedience to his law in that covenant, to observe all his institutions of worship, continuing stedfast in the doctrine and in the fellowship, and in breaking of bread and in prayers, praising God, and to obey his new commandment in all the branches of it, and to observe all things whatsoever he commands as they find them written in his law. And while they are thus separated to the law of God, let them be in the diligent use of every means there prescribed, for keeping up the study of conformity to the scripture character of a christian among them, as these mentioned, *Matt. xviii.* and *1 Cor. v.* *Heb. iii.* 12, 13. and *x.* 23, 24, 25. and *xii.* 15. Lest they again swerve from the work of faith, and labour of love and patience of hope, and return to a form of godliness, denying the power of it.

And when the christian people thus separate themselves to the law of God, let none be acknowledg'd as ministers of the word of elders, but according to their conformity to the scripture description of a minister; even as among the captives returned from typical *Babylon*, these were put from the priest-hood, as prophane, whose descent from *Aaron* did not appear.

3. Let the connexion betwixt christianity and the cross, of which *Paul* speaks to *Timothy*, when forewarning him of the perilous times, be carefully observ'd. When the apostle sets his doctrine and manner of life, in opposition to them that have a form of godliness, denying the power of it, he insists on his patience, and sets forth his sufferings, and lest any should imagine this was peculiar to him, or the time wherein he liv'd, he says, *yea and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*. Men may have the form of godliness, of which he speaks, without persecution; yea it was the proper fruit of an endeavour to separate christianity from the cross; but live godly in Christ Jesus without the cross, they cannot. This, living godly in Christ, is not a manner of life utterly hid from the world's view, as they that are gainers by the form of godliness without the power of it, would have its power to ly unobserv'd, lest, being as light set on a candlestick, or as a city on a hill, it should create them disturbance; and so they tell the deluded people pretty tales of this sort, that it is the best way of going to heaven, to go with the sound of their feet unheard. But the godly living, that the apostle speaks of, is a manner of life that provokes the hatred of the ungodly, and brings on persecution from the world.

It is true the first christians had sometimes rest from publick persecution, as *Acts ix. 31.* and *Paul* himself was not always in the hands of the magistrate, yea our Lord the great pattern

tern of suffering did not suffer publicly from the powers of the earth till the end ; but he has fortold, that a man's foes shall be they of his own house, and private persecution, from friends and neighbours, and all sorts of men, that we live among in the world, for the sake of Christ and his word, is no such light thing as they that look on it at a distance may be ready to imagine ; yea the trial of cruel mockings for his sake cannot be made easie but by that same grace that acted in Christ when he patiently endured the cross despising the shame. The psalmist in his name complains of hypocritical mockers in feasts gnashing upon him with their teeth, and of his becoming a stranger unto his brethren, and an alien to mother's children, and of the men that sit in the gate speaking against him, and his being the song of the drunkards &c. Different parties of worldly men, contending for preheminance in this world, will be ridiculing and reproaching one another, but it is another thing, and requires more self-denial to be suffering from all sorts of men for the word of God, than to be enduring for the sake of a man's self, in pursuing and hoping to attain the honour, gain or ease of a present world. The clergy have endured much to raise themselves in the world, and maintain what they have gain'd, but the sufferings of the first Christians were not attended with any worldly hope, and they were supported under them with no hope but that which is propos'd in the gospel. *Paul* declares his disposition in this matter, and his expectation of the

the concurrence of every confirmed Christian, when he says, *Yea doubtless and I count all things but loss,—that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his Death, if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.—Let us therefore as many as be perfect be thus minded.—Phil. iii.*

As he there states an opposition betwixt his way and that of the *Judaizers* who minded earthly things, so here he states an opposition between living godly in Christ with suffering, and the way of the men contending for the form of godliness without the Power of it: For he says.—*But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse deceiving and being deceived.* He tells the *Galatians* how such men were shunning the cross by corrupting the gospel, reconciling it some way to its enemies, especially in points whereat they were most enraged. And, in after-ages, the desire of conformity to the world and of friendship with it, worked in that same way and produced the form of godliness with a denial of the power of it; and so men went farther and farther from the old purpose of conformity to a humbled Christ, and from the christian patience of hope, till they began to think, not only of escaping persecution themselves, but even of persecuting others; so that at length the form of godliness became an engine of persecution against the power of godliness, as well as a proper mean of strife and bloodshed among themselves, differing

fering about the several parts of that form in their interests led them. And all this was carried on with the fairest pretences of zeal for the honour of Christ and christian prudence; yea it became a principle of christianity to persecute; and the ancient doctrine of love to enemies and patient bearing of wrongs, and the like, came to be as an old almanack calculated only for the Time of Christ and his Apostles. Therefore says the apostle, *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer; but evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived,*

Let them therefore that have reformation indeed at heart, shew the same Temper of mind that the apostle opposes to that of the antichristian generation. Let them separate themselves to live godly in Christ Jesus, desiring conformity to him in his humiliation, and shewing the hope of conformity to him in his glory. And let not these men speak of their suffering as Christians, who are at the same time shewing the hope of large contributions, for their life in this world, from an enraged multitude, and boasting in this, and in the hope of a numerous following, and a strong party to make head against another faction, yea and professing the principle of persecution and of the extirpation of all sects but their own out of the nation, as soon as it shall be in their power, and that they hope will be after this evil day is over. For such men will have a form of godliness suited unto these things wherein they boast, and shun every confession and practice

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religion, that appears inconsistent with those things, let it be never so clear in the New Testament. So their separation cannot be returning away from them that have a form of godliness denying the power of it, but a division from that form in one shape, to establish it in another.

Let such as want to see gospel reformation, look on every opportunity of separating the Jews and christianity, by abating a very little of its rigor, as a strong temptation, and guard against it. Let them treat every occasion of rising in this world, and being avenged on their enemies, as our Lord treated the vogue of the multitude, and their purposes of making him a king. And while they give the strictest obedience, and pay the greatest deference to magistrates, as the New Testament commands, and reject all them that are not afraid to speak evil of dignities, let them beware of all the tricks the Clergy have been playing with the magistrate from the days of *Constantine*. But let them reckon themselves, as every first church of the saints did, complete in Christ the head of all principality and power, head over all the heavenly hosts, powers of heaven, powers of hell and powers of the earth, unto the church which is his body, unto whom therefore every member of that body has a readier and more immediate access than to any of his vassals on whom they must not depend, but hold that head under whom they are all working together for the good of his body the church; and whatever way they behave under the conduct

duct of his providence, they are working
gether to bring the nations of them that
saved into the new *Jerusalem*, who have the
dependence on none but their head, and all
powers in the creation, good or bad, are serv
them, while they hold that head.

These three directions, given by the apo
against the perils of the last times, are
laid before the consciences of them, espec
that shew any desire to escape these perils,
however these may treat them now, their
sciences will one way or other answer u
them before the judgment seat of Christ.

FINIS

